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MYSTERY GOD AND OLYMPIAN GOD

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That man's social instincts and emotions have been intimately bound up with his religious emotions and ideas is, happily, in no danger of being forgotten. Through the cumulative impact of many motives, we are learning to look to man's social experience for such insight as the analysis of individual experience seemed not to afford. Thus far, the most striking instance of this—at least in the popular mind—is in the domain of morals. Conscience, when viewed as the possession and experience of the individual alone, has every appearance of something sacred and imperious, absolute and inexplicable. But once let conscience be put into the crucible of anthropology and social psychology, and its mysteriousness and absoluteness seem to have vanished. We see its function and we comprehend its genesis. It is simply the echo within the individual of the past experience of the race, an inherited instinct, which has a definite survival value in the struggle for existence. It would hardly be fair to say that every question about the meaning and worth of conscience is forthwith settled. Concerning the ultimate inferences to be drawn from the undoubted fact that conscience has had a history within man's social experience, there is much which may easily escape us in our first enthusiasm for the concepts of history, development, and social experience.

Something of the same zest and confidence which first attended the application of the concept of social experience to the analysis of conscience and morality has

reappeared among students of religion. Perhaps here too an understanding of the life of man in society will enable us really and for the first time to understand, at least in outline, what manner of thing religion is and has been and perhaps will be. For the problem is not purely theoretical; it is intensely practical as well. No thoughtful person can help wondering as to the future of those energies and sentiments and loyalties which have clustered around the religious life of the race, but which now present so many signs of disintegration and decay. How many prophets among us there are who see no future for any of the so-called religious energies, save as they are redirected upon man's supreme social interests and experiences. The life of society, the common mass life, we know, because we are of its very heart; it is indeed we; what if it be God as well? What if that which men have sought for in religion is, in truth, to be found in their actual social experiences? What if man's religion in the past has been only a language in which the realities of his social experience have found utterance?

“The human world has become infinitely more human than formerly; all the bounds which separated men from each other (religion, language, nationality, race) are regarded already by superior men as artificial. The human race itself is coming to be recognized as a part only of the animal kingdom; the entire world claims the attention of science, offers itself to our love, and opens for the devotees of mysticism the perspective of a species of universal fraternity. Just in so far as the universe thus grows larger, it becomes less and less insufficient in our eyes; and this surplus of love, which formerly mounted toward heaven in search of some transcendent resting-place, finds ample room upon the surface of the earth and of heavenly bodies not unknown to astronomy.”¹

The fascinating and the radical aspect of this interpretation of religion lies in the fact that it seems to dis-

¹ Guyau; *The Non-Religion of the Future*, p. 209.

solve away the literalness, the objective truth of the fundamental religious ideas, while at the same time it does not dismiss those ideas as illusions, but interprets them as expressions of what is certainly real and important—namely, just man's social experiences and emotions. And the question then arises, if religion is the echo and deposit of the collective emotions and ideas of men, why should such collective emotions and experiences utter themselves in the form of religion; why should there ever arise the figure of a distant and remote God, literally real, and other than the life and experiences of his worshippers? Can we discover anywhere in history such a making of a God out of social experience? And if we believe that we can discover how and why the very real experiences of men undergoing group emotion should take on the form of religion and should leave as a deposit the idea of an objective, existent God, what should we infer about the essence and about the permanent worth and truth of religion?

An active school of writers has in recent years maintained the thesis that religion is such a deposit of social experience, and has endeavored to give in detail an answer to the questions we have just asked. From the side of sociology the leader of this school is Durkheim.² From the side of archaeology and the history of religion, the most conspicuous writer is Miss Harrison.³ The work of this school is impressive, I think, not so much because of the mass of detailed anthropological and archaeological evidence which they ingeniously or perversely adduce, as because of the deeper, the philosophical significance of the hypotheses they are so vigorously urging. A whole system of metaphysics lies concealed

² Durkheim's chief work on religion is *Les Formes élémentaires de la vie religieuse*. Paris, 1912.

³ *Prolegomena to the Study of Greek Religion*; Jane E. Harrison, Cambridge, 1903. And above all, *Themis; A Study of the Social Origins of Greek Religion*. Cambridge, 1912. There should also be mentioned the book of F. M. Cornford; *From Religion to Philosophy*. London, 1912.

within their interpretation of religion. Motives which are everywhere dominant in the thinking and feeling of our time here find concrete expression in novel and alluring ways. In Miss Harrison's *Themis* this main thesis about the essence of religion is applied to Greek religion, and is used as a means for estimating the religious worth of various strands in its marvellously complex totality. Concerning the mass of evidence which Miss Harrison adduces in verification of this thesis, the student of philosophy who is neither an archaeologist nor classicist has no right to an opinion; there are, however, philosophical and religious issues raised by these discussions which are, in very large measure, independent of the specific facts which are cited as evidence. The present paper offers a study of one such philosophical and religious problem—that, namely, which concerns the nature and significance of the contrast between mystery god and Olympian god. It is perhaps not too much to say that in the question about the meaning and the value of this contrast are concentrated the most profound and difficult of the religious problems which trouble our own age. Here too something of the universal genius of the Greek mind is displayed, sketching in bold outline the typical forms of culture and its enduring problems for all times.

Let us consider first the outstanding characteristics of the mystery god, and of the religion whose god he is, as these are set forth by the writers we are considering. We may best do this if we first observe that the mystery god of Greek and Hellenistic religion is the direct heir of the "God" who expresses the essential and unspoiled religious impulse of primitive man, if we accept Durkheim's interpretation of early religion. His claim to divinity is vouched for by this continuity. And he still possesses the vigor and the life of those emotions and instincts, which indeed *are* life and which gave

birth to the religious life itself. Herein, we are told, lies his religious superiority to the Olympians, "intellectual conceptions merely, things of thought bearing but slight relation to life lived."⁴ And thus we are sent to primitive religion, to the origin and source of religion, if we would rightly understand the mystery gods of historical Greece. What are the historical roots of the religious life and tradition?

Recent studies of primitive religion have evidenced an increasing discontent with the traditional view which sees in man's early religion chiefly the product of an illusory anthropomorphism due either to false inductive processes or to what Max Müller called a "disease of language." We may now, I think, say with some measure of confidence that whatever else primitive religion may have been, it was more and other than any simple belief in ghostlike beings conceived in order to explain the mysteries of life and of nature, the phenomena of sleep and dreams and death. Religion preceded such naïve animism, just as it has outlived it. Where then shall we look for the central core of primitive religion? Robertson Smith's *Religion of the Semites* opened the way to a different interpretation. He emphasized as the fundamental conception of ancient religion the "solidarity of the gods and of their worshippers as part of one organic society."⁵ This vital sense and emotion of social solidarity, which was also cosmic in its scope and intent, received its typical and supreme expression in the common sacrificial meal, where the community, men and gods alike, partook of one food, one life. More recently, Durkheim and his school have pointed out that even such a conception as that of Smith is too individualistic and too animistic. There are not at the outset men and gods; there is rather only the social group, and the collective emotions and representations which are gener-

⁴ *Themis*, p. xvii.

⁵ *The Religion of the Semites*, p. 32.

ated through membership in the group. Let us expand this main thesis of Durkheim and report its chief constituents. There are two fundamental things to be noted: First, the essential ingredient of all religious ideas and rites is to be found in the distinction which such ideas and rites set forth or imply; the distinction, namely, between the sacred and the profane. "The division of the world into two comprehensive domains, the one comprising all that which is sacred, the other all that is profane—such is the distinctive trait of religious thought; beliefs, myths, dogmas, legends are either representations or systems of representations which express the nature of sacred things, the virtues and powers which are their attributes, their history, their relations with one another and with profane things." "Rites are rules of conduct which prescribe how man ought to behave with respect to sacred objects."⁶

There is thus an ineradicable dualism at the very birth of religion. Religion is man's expression of the discovery of a cleavage between that which is ordinary and common and that which is charged with mystery and sacredness. But this merely restates the problem. What is it in man's experience which compels him so to split up his universe? what is the source of the concept of the sacred itself? Durkheim's answer is that social experience alone can evoke the sentiment of the sacred. It is as a member of the mass life, when the individual is no longer merely himself, but lives and feels the larger emotions surging around and through him; it is through this social experience that he is transported to a level of existence which is beyond the common and the ordinary, which is divine. That social experience may intensify and transmute individual feeling is of course a familiar fact. "The laws of the multiplication of human power by association have never been worked out; but no one has failed to

⁶ Durkheim; *Les Formes élémentaires*, pp. 50, 56.

measure in frequent experiences what incredible enhancement of the value of any experience may occur in a single touch of endorsement from without.”⁷ And it is this enhancement of individual feeling through social experience which enabled Carlyle to speak of society as the “standing wonder of our existence, a true region of the supernatural,” in which “man has joined himself with man; soul acts and reacts on soul; a mystic unfathomable union establishes itself; Life in all its elements has become intensitated, consecrated.”⁸

Durkheim applies such familiar facts of our experience to the question concerning the origin of the idea of the sacred. The life of primitive man seems subject to a rhythm in which there alternate periods of dispersion, when his life is ordinary, monotonous, and common, and periods of concentration, of social excitement, of contact which heightens the intensity and range of feeling and generates that which is inspired and sacred. Here are literally two worlds which the individual experiences—a world of sense-experience where economic and physical activities predominate, and a world which makes itself felt during those periods of social “effervescence,” when one immediately participates in a larger and different world through his social experiences, his group, or collective consciousness. It is a qualitatively new experience as well as one which is more overwhelming and intense. Here are then two outstanding facts to be kept in mind in interpreting the religion of primitive man. There is first the concept, or better, the emotion, the “collective representation” of something sacred, of something removed from the common, and of supreme importance for human weal and woe. Here is a supernaturalism which is prior to animism, a religion prior to objective or personal gods. And secondly, this rep-

⁷ Hocking; *The Meaning of God in Human Experience*, p. 222.

⁸ Characteristics. *Works*, Vol. I, p. 340.

resentation of the sacred, this theoplasm and matrix of all religion, is the deposit of *collective* feeling, of social experience. "Not only does the god reflect the thoughts, social conditions, morality, and the like, but in its origin his substance when analyzed turns out to be just nothing but the representation, the utterance, the emphasis of these imaginations, these emotions, arising out of particular social conditions."⁹

There follow from these two fundamental facts about primitive religion, certain derivative characteristics which must be briefly noticed. Here at its source, religion contains no worship of any foreign force or person. It is the felt participation of the individual in a collective consciousness which is super-individual, yet continuous with the individual consciousness. Here is a "reservoir," to use an expression of Cornford, to which the individual has access through religious rites, which, as we have seen, both utter and in turn intensify the group emotions. The vehicle of group emotion, the source and stuff of that which was sacred and supernatural, was no personal god or spirit, but an impersonal Mana, Wakonda, which is spoken of variously as a "sympathetic continuum," a "primitive magical complex," a "system of sanctities which knew no Gods," a "social force trembling on the very verge of Godhead." Everything which primitive man does and thinks—the chase and the warpath, the social relationships of marriage and kinship, his practices concerning birth, death, and burial, his magic and his art—are all charged with and rendered potent and awe-inspiring by this one pervasive and continuous Power, this Mana. Its influence spreads everywhere, infecting with fear and awe the entire range of the world. If its more positive and wholesome aspect is expressed in his religious rites and feelings—wholesome because under social control—its more negative and fearsome side is found in the darker practices of his magic and his taboos,

⁹ *Themis*, p. 28.

where the dread power has broken away from the more regular and social control of the group emotions.

But primitive religion is not merely an utterance of man's social experience, as we understand the term "social." This felt continuum of life and force which is the original stuff of all gods and the source of all spiritual substance, is not merely the bond which unites man to man in a common group life; it also unites the entire social group to nature so that both man and nature participate in one common life. It is impossible to say where the social and the human end, and where begins the mere awareness of natural objects. The totemic group includes both man and his natural environment in unbroken unity. Both man and nature participate in one common felt life. Here is a whole of life and nature, which as yet is unbroken, which is not yet disturbed by analysis and reflection, self-consciousness and individualism. The collective representation which feels and thinks this entire situation is governed by what M. Levy-Bruhl has designated the "Law of Participation." Because of the pervasive influence of the supernatural Power, the feeling and representation of which generates religion, there is a "mystic identity" between objects. Men actually are animals, the new-born infant actually is both the ancestor of the clan and the totem of the clan. According to this law, "objects can be at once themselves and other than themselves."¹⁰ Experience is interpreted in the light of this prepossession; the law itself is "impermeable to experience"—until indeed this pre-logical stage of human thinking gives way to the stage of a more logical and analytical thinking. Thus, man's social experience, his collective emotions and representations, have at the outset a more than human significance; they are cosmic and metaphysical in their scope and intent.

¹⁰ Levy-Bruhl; *Les Fonctions mentales dans les sociétés inférieures*, p. 77.

There is one further fact about early religion which these writers emphasize. It is, they hold, a legitimate inference from the available facts. Religion can now be interpreted as something that in its essence is not illusory, precisely because man's social experience is not an illusion.

"We are able to say, in sum, that the religious individual does not deceive himself when he believes in the existence of a moral power upon which he depends and from which he holds the larger portion of himself. That power exists; it is society. When the Australian is carried in transport beyond himself, when he feels within himself the surging of a life whose intensity surprises him, he is the dupe of no illusion; that exaltation is real, and it is really the product of forces that are external and superior to the individual."¹¹

Such is the account of primitive religion and of the origin of the mystery god which Durkheim and his followers give. Miss Harrison summarizes the matter thus:

"Totemism then is not so much a special social structure as a stage in epistemology. It is the reflection of a very primitive fashion in thinking, or rather feeling, the universe, a feeling the realization of which is essential to any understanding of primitive religion. It is not a particular blunder and confusion made by certain ignorant savages, but a phase or stage of collective thinking through which the human mind is bound to pass. Its basis is group-unity, aggregation, similarity, sympathy, a sense of common group-life, and this sense of common life, this participation, this unity, is extended to the non-human world in a way which our modern, individualistic reason, based on observed distinctions, finds almost unthinkable."¹²

In the religion of such primitive mystery gods there is expressed unquestionably one potent and enduring motive and element of all religion. Let us apply to this entire motive, this one element of all religion, the term which appears in the quotation just given and which I have already used—the term "participation." The inti-

¹¹ Durkheim, p. 322.

¹² Themis, p. 122.

mate, immediate participation of the individual in a larger life than his own, this is what we have been describing. It is, of course, one ingredient of all mysticism. It is one impulse of the religious life to grasp some whole of things as one and indivisible, not as an inert collection, but as a single life, and to participate intimately in that life. Is it now the only impulse capable of imparting vigor and significance to man's whole enterprise? is it even the central impulse? for this is what religion must accomplish if it is to hold its own.

Let us keep this question in mind as we turn to that other tradition in Greek religion which centres around the great gods of Mount Olympus. Miss Harrison has presented the contrast between the mystery religion and the Olympian religion as if the latter were the product of motives and energies which, whatever their other values, are devoid of genuine religious worth. The Olympians, in the end, are judged to be "intellectual conceptions merely, things of thought bearing but slight relation to life lived.¹³ The mystery gods degenerate into Olympians just because religion, which means group-unity, emotion, indissolvability, life, participation, is unable to resist the encroachment of the "tendency in thought which is towards reflection, differentiation, clearness." As a matter of historical development and chronological sequence, we are not concerned with the correctness of Miss Harrison's thesis. It may be true that none of the Olympians ever developed from the impersonal, functional group demons, in the way Miss Harrison supposes. Nevertheless, the contrast between mystery god and Olympian remains, whatever may have been the genesis of the Olympians. And there remain too the motives which lead to the refusal to attribute any religious worth to the Olympians. This contrast and these motives concern us here.

There are five respects in which the mystery god is contrasted with the Olympian:

¹³ *Themis*, p. xvii.

1. The Olympians emerge only when all sacredness and divinity are excluded from nature. The primitive totemic unity, the "sympathetic continuum" between the social group and natural objects, in which as yet there is no external God, becomes broken. Divinity is now remote, not near; the immediate natural surroundings of men no longer are pervaded with mystery and Life, but become common objects, the domain of scientific analysis and practical utilities. The direct evidence for this, according to Miss Harrison, is that the "Olympian sheds his plant or animal form."¹⁴ He gradually shifts from a nature god, instinct with the life and emotions which pulse through nature and the social group continuous with her, to a human-nature god. And this process is essentially one of loss, so far as religious values are concerned. The characteristics of the Olympian human-nature god are mainly negative, the result of stripping off, through analysis and reflection, those vital characteristics which ever made the mystery god so near and so pregnant with meaning and value. The mystery gods, on the other hand, retain a strange beauty and charm and appeal to the very end. They "are never free of totemistic hauntings, never quite shed their plant and animal shapes. That lies in the very nature of their sacramental worship. They are still alive with the life-blood of all living things from which they sprang."¹⁵ Mysticism, let it be noted, never breaks entirely with pantheistic naturism. "Alle Schwärmerei ist und wird nothwendig Naturphilosophie," was the judgment of Fichte.

2. The Olympians cease to be either the symbols or the projections of a group soul. They no longer have, as an intimate part of their very substance, a community following, a *thiasos*; they are no longer a many-in-one, but solitary individuals. In the Hymn of the Kouretes,

¹⁴ *Themis*, p. 447.

¹⁵ *Ibid.* p. 450.

whose elucidation furnishes the theme of Miss Harrison's *Themis*, the Kouros, the young Zeus, is hailed as coming at the head of his attendents, his *daimones*. Zeus then once had a *thiasos*, a following, a social group which attended him. "When he grew up to be the Father, it seems, he lost his *thiasos* and has gone about unattended ever since. If we can once seize the meaning of this *thiasos* and its relation to the god, we shall have gone far to understand the making of Greek mythology."¹⁶ And the meaning ascribed to the *thiasos* by the school whose teachings we are now considering is, as we have seen, the fundamental thesis that religion is to be interpreted wholly in terms of man's social experience. The Kouros, the young god, is only the projection of the Kouretes; Dionysos is "but his *thiasos* incarnate." The Kouretes, a band of youths about to be initiated, dance an excited mimetic dance. They thus utter together their feelings, their delight and terror, their desires. And

"being a collective emotion, it is necessarily felt as something more than the experience of the individual, as something dominant and external. . . . They sink their own personality . . . , they become emotionally one, a true congregation, not a collection of individuals. The emotion they feel collectively, the thing that is more than any individual emotion, they externalize, project; it is the raw material of god-head. Primitive gods are to a large extent collective enthusiasms, uttered, formulated."¹⁷

And just so long as the bond between the *thiasos* and the god remains intact, so long as the worshippers feel the intimacy which makes themselves and their god partakers of one Life, participating in a common substance, just so long is the god a genuine god, a true mystery god. But when the *thiasos*, the social group of worshippers, no longer participates in the life of the god, the god becomes a solitary individual, remote, and aloof, majestic it may be, but no longer the incarnation of man's deepest

¹⁶ *Themis*, p. 12.

¹⁷ *Ibid.* pp. 45-46.

emotions and desires. Such are the Olympians. They are "the last product of rationalism, of individualistic thinking; the *thiasos* has projected them utterly. Cut off from the very source of their life and being, the emotion of the *thiasos*, they desiccate and die. Dionysos with his *thiasos* is still Comus, still trails behind him the glory of the old group ecstasy."¹⁸

3. The Olympians cease to perform the functions of the older divinities, and demand instead that honor and service be rendered to them as superior personalities. The older gods, akin to the mystery gods, were without distinct title, ready to take on plant or animal shape, symbols of functions and activities performed, sharing in the life and labor both of man and of nature. But the Olympian renounces all of this; "instead of being himself a sacrament he demands a sacrifice."¹⁹ The inherent democracy of mysticism, of participation on the part of worshipper and god alike, in a common life and in common tasks, is replaced by the aristocratic and dualistic severance between the god who receives and men who give him honor and service. Gift-sacrifice, externality, formalism, are substituted for intimacy and felt unity, remoteness for participation. When the matter is thus presented, almost every motive which appeals to us makes us condemn the Olympians as sterile and fruitless. "Sentiment, tradition, may keep up the custom of gift-sacrifice for a while, but the gods to whom the worshipper's real heart and life goes out are the gods who work and live, not those who dwell at ease in Olympos."²⁰

4. One function which the mystery god performed for his worshippers was all-important. He not only lived and worked for them; he died for them as well. But the Olympian is immortal; this is his chief claim to distinction and remoteness from man, and also it is "the

¹⁸ *Themis*, p. 48.

¹⁹ *Ibid.* p. 467.

²⁰ *Ibid.* p. 467.

crowning disability and curse of the new theological order.”²¹

He gains deathlessness and immutability, and he thinks thereby to gain life; but the life he wins is only a “seeming immortality which is really the denial of life, for life is change.”²² And this is part of a further paradox. The Olympian, we have noted, becomes completely human through ceasing to be a part of nature, through renouncing every plant and animal form, whatever is merely natural and non-human. But in thus being humanized, he loses the one supreme characteristic of human life, its change and mortality. The Olympian ceases to be both human and divine, and becomes divine alone. Men may now contemplate his beauty and perfection, but he is no longer such as men are; he no longer can sympathize with and participate in the human struggle. Hence the powerful appeal which the later mystery religions made to human need and feeling. It is not “to the bright Olympians who know naught of struggle and pain and death, but to gods who have shared these experiences, who have triumphed over death and risen to new life, that the hope of immortality attaches itself; for in their victory is the evidence that death can be overcome, and their example shows the way.”²³

5. A final contrast goes to the very root of the problem. It is the contrast between two radically discrepant attitudes, two functions within human experience, which are as two opposite poles. One of these attitudes or functions has already appeared in our discussion. It is the attitude of felt participation. The mystery religions, and mystery gods, the social experience and collective emotions which lie at their root, have shown us the meaning of “participation.” Let us call the other attitude “contemplation.” The object contemplated is

²¹ Themis, p. 467.

²² Ibid. p. 468.

²³ Moore; *The History of Religions*, p. 444.

distinct from the one who contemplates; it is not participated in, not possessed in any of that emotional warmth which belongs to the essence of participation. Thus do the Olympians renounce all intimate participation in the life and sufferings of man, and take up their remote abode there where no mortal dare have any share or participation.

"We touch here on the very heart and secret of the difference between the Olympian and the mystery god, between Apollo and Zeus on the one hand and Dionysos on the other. . . . The Olympian has clear form, he is the '*principium individuationis*' incarnate; he can be thought, hence his calm, his *sophrosyne*. The mystery god is the life of the whole of things, he can only be felt; as soon as he is thought and individualized he passes, as Dionysos had to pass, into the thin rare ether of the Olympian. The Olympians are of conscious thinking, distinct, departmental; the mystery god is the impulse of life through all things, perennial, indivisible."²⁴

At best, it would seem, the Olympians are objects of art, of aesthetic enjoyment; mere "artists' dreams and ideals," Gilbert Murray calls them. Detachment and remoteness, the forgetting of all selective interests, feelings, and desires, are the characteristic moments of the purely aesthetic attitude of contemplation. Such aesthetic contemplation and detachment means the decay of vital, felt participation.

Now this contrast between participation and contemplation is the crux of the whole matter, and raises a fundamental problem about the whole interpretation of religion. We must determine once and for all whether the motives that contribute to the development of contemplation, of remoteness, and the subsequent decay of immediate participation, are traitors to the genuine religious impulse, to be deplored as of purely negative and destructive influence upon the religious life, or whether, on the other hand, they contribute anything of positive

²⁴ *Themis*, p. 476.

worth to religion. We have more than once observed that, in the judgment of the writers we have been dealing with, the former is the true account of the matter. Throughout, in Miss Harrison's treatise, the Olympians are regarded as but an "intellectual backwater," "intellectual conceptions merely, things of thought bearing but slight relation to life lived." And this is the common judgment of all those who interpret whatever is enduring and significant in religion to be merely an expression of man's social consciousness and experience, his sense of participation in a common, mass life. This motive and this judgment are offered us now in the name of mysticism, and again in the name of democracy. There is no dearth of vigorous writers and teachers who see in just this same motive of participation which engendered the mystery god our one chance for religion in the future. Professor Leuba has written, towards the close of his volume, *The Psychological Study of Religion*, the following:

"There is no question but that Humanity idealized and conceived as a manifestation of Creative Energy possesses surpassing qualifications for a source of religious inspiration. Human relationships have always given rise to the noblest activities of men; they have been and remain the very fountain of life. In a religion of Humanity, man's attention would be directed not to a remote, intangible Perfection, but to a concrete reality of which he is a part and the perfection of which depends upon his own perfection. In Humanity each person can regard himself as a link in the chain connecting the hosts of the past with the hosts that are to come. The recognition of this vast relationship would give a sense of fellowship and unity; it would make a world worthy of one's best efforts."²⁵

And again one other writer:

"It is this 'large figure,' not simply of human, but of cosmic society, which is to yield our God of the future. It is the figure of myriad lives, and yet one vast group life, in ceaseless activity. There is no place in the figure for an eternally perfect being, and no need;

²⁵ *Themis*, p. 355.

no need, for the vast society by its own inherent mass—dialectic, of struggle and adaptation, co-operation and conflict—is working out its own destiny; no place, for the society, democratic from end to end, can brook no such radical class distinction as that between a supreme being favored with eternal and absolute perfection and the mass of beings doomed to the lower ways of imperfect struggle. It is the large figure out of which is projected the conception of the God that is ourselves, in whom and of whom we literally are; the God that, in every act and intention, we, with all our countless fellows, are realizing.”²⁶

We face the problem then as to whether the motive and attitude of contemplation, of detachment and remoteness, is really a positive element within the genuine religious life, or whether it is an intruder, a source of decay and of blight. And for our age it is the problem as to whether the social experiences which sum themselves up in the idea of participation in the common life of humanity are adequate bearers of the religion of the future.

There are some fundamental reasons, doubly urgent in the present crisis of civilization which, I believe, point indubitably in a different direction from the one taken by Miss Harrison as well as by the authors I have just quoted. And I will say nothing here of the lack of historical justice, which would exclude from the religious life of humanity some of its most precious religious inheritances. If participation alone is worthy to count as the motive and generator of religion, one will of necessity exclude from the reflective religious tradition that contemplation of remote and deathless entities which Plato expressed in his theory of Ideas, the God of Aristotle’s theology, Stoic resignation and “apathy,” one constant strain which runs through the *Imitation of Christ*, the most characteristic things in the theology of St. Thomas, Spinoza’s Intellectual Love of God, and

²⁶ The Democratic Conception of God; Professor H. A. Overstreet. Hibbert Journal, Vol. XI, p. 409.

certainly one element within mysticism which in its higher forms is a compound of both Participation and Contemplation. The inherent religious quality and worth of contemplation as well as of participation, must surely be admitted. But it is another and, as I believe, a far more serious criticism of the denial to the Olympians of religious worth, which may here be mentioned. The very absence of the possibility of participation, the remoteness of man and gods which contemplation signifies, are the necessary accompaniment of the long process whereby man learns to distinguish between what is near, close at hand, immediate, and what is good, what is the ideal and the goal of his destiny. The Olympian remoteness and contemplation are both an accompaniment of this moral process and they aid and stimulate it as well. And this is *the* moral process. The moral consciousness can emerge and can play its part in human life only as the primitive mysticism of participation breaks up, in order that some quality of contemplation may appear. Perhaps at some further stage of religion participation may reappear on a higher level, higher because of what it has learned from contemplation and the moral consciousness. The development of the Olympian tradition was then not less chiefly, not an "intellectual backwater," but a necessary part of religion, contributing something of positive worth to the whole process. The distinction is a real one between the natural and the ethical religions. As long as man's life blends with that of nature in one felt unity, as long as that social and natural mysticism prevails, which characterizes the totemism of early religion, man will not dream of possessing or achieving an ideal good, freed from the irrational limitations of feeling and caprice. Both the social group and the nature continuous with it must cease to satisfy before man can seek or find a God who is also good.

That the Olympians came to represent and sanction moral ideals cannot be doubted. Imaginative playthings, objects of art, abstract intellectual conceptions, they may well have been, but the moral function is there too, and it is sufficient to save the serious and the religious character of the Olympians. The best proof of this is furnished by a study of the cult titles used in prayer and sacrifice. An exhaustive account of these is given by Mr. Farnell, in his *Cults of the Greek State*. Social, political, and ethical designations of the functions of the great Olympians are found in abundance; indeed it is not too much to say that they predominate. The Olympians, when worshipped under these ethical cult titles, were no *objets d'art*, yet they were, to be sure, objects of contemplation. But to contemplate a distant being or object is not of necessity mere idle play of the aesthetic imagination, though it may become this. There is a moral vision of some ideal perfection, contemplated from afar, not participated in, and from such contemplation may come added zest and significance.

But the radical fallacy which lurks in the disparagement of the religious worth of the Olympians and which supposes them to be mere intellectual playthings and objects of poetic fancy, lies still deeper. The fallacy rests at bottom upon the assumption that the immediacies of felt experience are self-sufficing, able to sustain and to guarantee all of the values of life; that whatever is not to be thus possessed and participated in, whatever is a distant object of mere knowledge and contemplation, is pale and shadowy, inert and fruitless. But that the religious consciousness which has uttered itself in the historical religions fits in with this assumption, whether true or false, cannot be admitted for a moment. Examine the religious consciousness and go back once more to its totemistic origins, as Durkheim and his followers would have us do. Here is, we have seen, the felt unity

both of a human group and of some province of nature. Both "pools," as Mr. Cornford calls them, the human pool and the nature pool, are, at the outset, continuous with each other, so that there is felt to be, in truth, but one group. Because everything belongs to the one felt group, the one "sympathetic continuum," every region of the group participates in every other region.

Here then is no dualism, no externality, no contemplation. And yet that which is later to become simply the human world even now really has its environment, its background; and this awareness of the environment, of some genuine whole of things, makes this primitive consciousness religious in addition to being social. The religious moment within this primitive feeling relates to the specifically human group. Totemism is, in brief, religious because the feeling to which the totemic system gives birth is more than mere feeling; it is something cognitive, it bears witness to a background and an environment. Now it is the function of the Olympians, as of all such gods who express the motive of contemplation rather than participation, that they keep alive this knowledge side of religion, this reference to some background of things precisely not here and now experienced and participated in. They are symbols of a distant city of God, a Platonic Realm of Ideas, the thought of which, even if only in sheer imagination, can alone lend stability and significance. Thus can the Olympians be spoken of, in a splendid phrase, as "the symbols of eternity and calm in a transient and troubled world."²⁷

It is because there is a profound difference between the immediacies of feeling-experience and some knowledge of what the environment and background of experience are, that religion is not, in the end, to be interpreted in terms of social experience. Social experience, in so many ways the highest level of our experience, is, after all, like

²⁷ J. Adam; *The Religious Teachers of Greece*, p. 117.

all experience, something immediate, possessed now and here. Religion, better than anything else, can serve to keep alive in men's minds awareness of the total setting of our lives and our experiences, which even vaguely and dimly to know is infinitely better than sheer contentment with the immediate possessions of experience, even though they be as precious as are our social experiences. At any rate, such is the utterance of religion. To see nothing of positive religious worth in the "blessed ones who dwell on Olympus," to see in social mysticism, in participation, in the dominance of the democratic impulse, the whole of religion's enduring worth, is to be strangely blind to the inner impulse of the religious tradition itself.